

THRIVING
with RETT



THERAPEUTIC HORSEBACK RIDING GUIDE

Erin Hurley,
Occupational Therapist

The benefits of therapeutic horseback riding are vast, and for individuals with Rett Syndrome, we typically focus on providing opportunities for sensory exploration, muscle strengthening, postural control, and enhancing quality of life.

Skills we target in therapeutic riding sessions include:

- / **Sensory processing**, specifically vestibular (balance), proprioception (body awareness), and tactile (touch) senses – therapeutic riding provides an opportunity for these individuals to experience a new, sensory-rich environment that supports the development of coordination, body awareness and functional hand use.
- / **Movement patterns** – when walking on a horse, the rider uses the same muscles they would use if they were walking on the ground
- / **Functional reach and grasp** – we know that hand use can be a challenge for these individuals, and we are able to adapt equipment and parts of the activity to both challenge them and enable them to be successful

- / **Muscle strength, tone and endurance** – movements and changes in direction and speed taken by a horse can strengthen and improve muscle tone for the rider
- / **Communication and social interaction**

Therapeutic horseback riding has many benefits for these unique individuals, beyond the physical benefits we often see with traditional therapies. Often this becomes a family activity, where the student's siblings or extended family get involved as volunteers by leading the horse or walking along side.

Additional resources:

Path International, EAAT: <https://www.pathintl.org/resources-education/resources/eaat>

American Hippotherapy Association: <https://www.americanhippotherapyassociation.org/>

HRH of New Jersey: <https://hrhofnj.org/about/>

For additional information contact:

Erin Hurley, OTR/L

Email: erin@unicornriding.com

Phone: 609-354-2014

Erin is an occupational therapist who has worked in therapeutic riding since 1990. She is the founder and Director of Unicorn Therapeutic Riding, a PATH Intl. Premier Accredited Center in Pennington, NJ. Erin has worked with several children with Rett Syndrome.